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US

# Illegal immigrant fights for pay after being elected Cal-Long Beach student body president

By **Hollie McKay**

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Salazar's story is inspiring, but some say student government leaders - illegal immigrants or not - should not be paid. (California-MexicoCenter.org)

Politics pays in college, but not quite as well for illegal immigrants.

Student government representatives at most public universities collect money for their service, including stipends as high as \$15,000 per year. But Jose Salazar, the student body president at California State Long Beach University, is barred by university bylaws from collecting because he is an illegal immigrant. He's using his political talents to find a loophole.

"I'm up for the challenge. I love challenges," Salazar told CBSLA.com.

School President Jane Close Conoley is on his side, and "searching for more permanent solutions for the undocumented students" in student government, according to reports.

The story of Salazar, who did not return repeated requests for comment, is inspiring to many. Elected president with 52 percent of the vote, the aerospace engineering and physics double major crossed into the U.S. from Mexico a decade ago with his mother and siblings. The family moved to Long Beach, where Salazar told school newspaper the [Daily 49er](#) he began middle school as one of just a few students who spoke only Spanish.



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*"This sense of entitlement to a salary breeds corruption, disguised as social justice."*

*- Jacob Ellenhorn, an Undergraduate Student Government senator at USC*

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"Everyone used to bully me and push me around," Salazar recalled. "I remember I was such an outcast that we had a table just for the outcasts and I was one of those, there were six of us."

As he campaigned for his current office, he faced more abuse, according to his predecessor, Joseph Phillips.

"On the campaign, he faced a lot of racism, a lot of bad comments, and he just kept going," Phillips said.

A representative for Cal State Long Beach told FoxNews.com that the salaried payment for students is coordinated through a separate foundation, Associated Students Inc., which is affiliated with the school. The representative confirmed that illegal immigrants in the presidential position are eligible for all other scholarships and perks, but cannot be paid financial compensation -- in this case an "annual fellowship" of \$1,264 a month -- without a work permit.

Salazar has applied for status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, an immigration policy that offers those who entered the country illegally prior to their 16th birthday a work permit and exemption from deportation. If approval is granted, he would likely be eligible for the stipend.

In the meantime, being president of the student body means Salazar receives free tuition, a \$300 monthly meal plan and the right to faculty parking.

Some critics say that is more than enough.

"[Salazar] is here illegally already and getting the benefits of those actions," said Dan Gainor, vice president of business and culture at the Media Research Center, adding that while he supports paying student government representatives compensation for their hours, "under no circumstances should illegal aliens be paid."

Whether Salazar can draw a salary for serving as president or not, he and other students across the country -- legal or otherwise -- are reaping huge benefits for their service. According to the American Student Government Association, more than 77 percent of student leaders are "compensated" with a salary.

Along with the pay, the package of perks and power differs from school to school, often with little rhyme or reason. Many students receive a stipend as well as a free, or heavily discounted, tuition, medical benefits, computers, cellphones, clothing allowances, meals, game day tickets and reserved parking passes.

According to W.H. "Butch" Oxendine, executive director of the American Student Government Association, the purpose of the stipends is not necessarily to "reward" the work being done, but to "level the playing field" so that all students -- regardless of

socio-economic standing -- can afford to spend their spare hours serving their school board instead of serving tables to survive college life.

"Maybe if the student is working two jobs, the small amount of compensation means they will only have to work one," he said. "But most students when they run aren't even aware that there is compensation; the compensation isn't the reason they want the position."

One California student government official says paying students to lead runs counter to the purpose of teaching public service.

"Student government is not a job. It is a place you go to volunteer your time and make your campus a better place," said Jacob Ellenhorn, an Undergraduate Student Government (USG) senator at University of Southern California. "This sense of entitlement to a salary breeds corruption, disguised as social justice."

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